

Parshat Va'eschanan 5781

When 'prayer' worked (and when it did not)

Va'eschanan – I implored (Devarim 3:23)

For Oneself

Rav Zalman Sorotzkin (Oznaim l'Torah) points out that there are 10 types of prayer enumerated in the Sifre. Moshe Rabbeinu chose to use 'chanan', which literally means "begging for a free gift". So the question is asked as to why did Moshe specifically choose this mode of prayer at that time?

For the first time in his life, the 'most humble of men' was about to ask for something for himself, and was unable to think of any merit to advance on his own behalf in justification of his prayer. Therefore Moshe had no option but to ask for a 'free gift' of mercy. As Shlomo HaMelech says "a poor man speaks imploringly" (Mishlei 18:23) - and since Moshe saw himself as a pauper when it came to his own merit, he spoke accordingly.

For the Public

But regarding prayer for the B'nai Yisrael, Moshe spoke in a completely different manner. Following the Chet HaEgel, Moshe asked "Why, Hashem, should your anger flare up against Your people?.....Relent from your flaring anger and reconsider the evil against Your people!" (Shemos 32:11-12). At that time Moshe felt as if he were "a rich man who responds fiercely" (Mishlei ibid.) - for he invariably found merits to advance on behalf of the people. As Chazal teach us "If one is asking on behalf of the public, it is as if he can force his way in" (Bemidbar Rabbah 21:14).

This Shabbos is 15 Av. Why did Moshe Rabbeinu Choose Tu b'Av to commence his Private Prayer? The Gemara states that Tu b'Av was a joyous day in the times of the Beis Hamikdash. One of the reasons given is an event which B'nai Yisrael experienced in the Midbar in the 40th year. Less than four months after yeziat mitzrayim, on the ninth of Av, the meraglim returned with their evil report against Eretz Yisrael. Since the people cried bitterly and refused to enter Eretz Yisrael, Hashem swore that the entire nation between the ages of twenty and sixty would die in the wilderness. The method used to implement this punishment was that annually, on the ninth of Av, graves were dug and the people would sleep (lay) in them. In the morning those who were alive would climb out of their graves, and those who had died would be buried where they were. This went on for each and every year of the journey in the wilderness. In the

fortieth year graves were dug in the usual way for the people to sleep in, but surprisingly, they all emerged alive. The people began to wonder, "Perhaps we have miscalculated and yesterday was not the Ninth of Av.

Therefore they continued sleeping in the graves on the tenth, eleventh, twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth. When they noticed a full moon on the fifteenth of Av, the people were certain that the ninth had already passed, and were thereby equally confident that the punishment had run its course (see *Bava Basra* 121 a). Thus, on the fifteenth of Av the B'nai Yisrael celebrated the fact that no one else would suffer for the Chet Ha-meraglim.

A thought therefore occurred to Moshe that if the B'nai Yisrael had finally been forgiven for not wanting to go to *Eretz Yisrael*, then maybe this was the opportune time to pray to Hashem to permit him to enter the land.

515 Prayers?

According to the *Midrash Rabbah* (11:10) the word *Va'eschanan* has a gematria of 515, and teaches that Moshe offered five hundred and fifteen prayers to Hashem to be permitted to enter *Eretz Yisrael*.

This is calculated in the following manner.

The Hebrew calendar normally has six months of 29 days and six months of 30 days. From the month of *Elul* till the month of *Adar* (in which Moshe died), there are six months. Counting three of them as full months (30 days) and three as incomplete ones (29 days), this is a total of 177 days. Adding to these 16 days from the fifteenth to the thirtieth of the month of *Av*, and seven days of the month of *Adar* until Moshe's passing, equates to a total of 200 days.

A Jew is required to pray three times a day. In each prayer he may include personal requests, except on Shabbat, when an individual's needs may not be mentioned (see Talmud Yerushalmi *Shabbat* 15:3; *Orach Chaim* 294:1). However, on *Yom Tov*, this is permissible (see *Magen Avraham* 128:70). Since in a 200 day period there are 28 *Shabbosos*, therefore 172 days remain in which a person prays three times a day (and may include personal requests). This totals 516 prayers.

On the night of the fifteenth, after seeing the new moon, the B'nai Yisrael realised that their sins were forgiven, and they therefore celebrated the following day. Hence, Moshe started praying from the morning of the fifteenth of *Av*, until *Minchah* of the seventh of *Adar*, uttering exactly a total of 515 prayers before his passing.